

# PLAYGROUP OFFERS EARLY LIFELINE

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**Tessa Feist at the Wanneroo Playgroup.**  
Picture: Justin Benson-Cooper

For almost 50 years, WA playgroups have been a hub for families with young children to gather, play and form friendships.

Now the not-for-profit community centres are set to expand their role — welcoming expectant parents before their children are born.

Playgroup WA yesterday launched a pilot project called First 1000 Days, supported by Lotterywest, aimed at boosting the profile of playgroups and their role in linking parents to the “village” that helps raise a child, be it mental health support, education or other neighbourhood families.

The project takes its name from research showing the importance of the first 1000 days in a child’s life — from conception to two years of age — to its long-term development.

Playgroup WA chief executive David Zarb said reaching families earlier would prevent issues later in life. “We know that mental health issues later in life just don’t appear magically, yet we are not doing enough to deal with them efficiently when we can,” he said. Mr Zarb said the project would also improve referral pathways between families and support agencies.

Wanneroo Playgroup will take part in the trial and president Joann Alban said she was looking forward to reaching more families. “We think it’s great to bring local mothers together before they have the baby, and to tell them ‘you’re not alone,’” she said.